

to conduct official business, putting fairness back into the appeals process, and ensuring taxpayers know the status of IRS investigations. This is not much to ask. Just tell us what is going on.

These bills are important steps toward a level of accountability the Obama administration has been unwilling to take. This is good legislation. It sets our bureaucrats straight.

□ 1045

WE CANNOT PERMANENTLY BE AT WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN PEOPLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DUNCAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNCAN of Tennessee. Madam Speaker, many years ago, I voted for the first gulf war after attending classified briefings about the great threats we faced from Saddam Hussein's elite troops; then I watched them surrender to CNN camera crews and empty tanks. I realized then that the threat had been greatly exaggerated.

A few years later, we rushed to war in Iraq against weapons of mass destruction that were not there. The threat at the time of the second gulf war was greatly exaggerated, and I am glad that I voted against going to war that time.

After the horrible beheadings of two American citizens, I felt we should respond, and I have publicly supported limited air strikes. I hope we can at some point, if we are not doing so already, send in a special operations team, or teams, to get those who have committed these beheadings just as we got Osama bin Laden; however, I do not support sending thousands of young Americans as combat troops on the ground into Middle Eastern civil and religious wars.

The primary responsibility for fighting over there should be up to the countries in that region, and I do not believe we should have some fake coalition where most of the fighting and most of the funding comes from the U.S. military as in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

While ISIS—or ISIL, as it has also been referred to—is a threat, we have faced far greater threats at other times in our history.

Some of our leaders clamor for war to prove how tough they are. Some want to be little Churchills. Many may believe, if they don't support the strongest possible action, they are afraid they will be blamed if something bad happens; however, both our President and the Secretary of Homeland Security have said our intelligence and military officials have no evidence of any credible threat against the U.S. at this point.

In addition, we have spent \$716 billion on homeland security since 9/11, just at the Federal level, not counting

the billions spent by State and local governments and private companies. Just one company, FedEx, told me a couple of years after 9/11 that they had spent \$200 million on security that they would not have spent had 9/11 not happened.

On top of that, we spend much more on defense than the next top 10 nations combined and almost more than all nations combined since the poor nations spend very little on defense. If we devoted our entire Federal budget to the Middle East, we could not stop all the fighting or solve all the problems of that region. If we spent our entire Federal budget on homeland security, we could not make our country 100 percent perfectly safe.

Some radical Islamic fanatic may do something bad in the U.S. but we are already spending all we can and doing all we can if we are going to meet the needs of our own people. The first obligation of the U.S. Congress should be to the American people, and the people of the Middle East are going to have to solve most of their own problems on their own.

We do not have the money or the authority to try to run the whole world, and we certainly shouldn't panic or overreact to this threat from ISIS. Just a few weeks ago, their numbers were supposedly between 5,000 and 10,000. Now, we suddenly have them up to 20,000 to 31,000, but we have over 1 million in our military, and, supposedly, other nations are going to help against ISIS.

The leaders of ISIS have proven themselves to be cowards by beheading unarmed, defenseless men in front of cameras in undisclosed locations. We fought against al Qaeda in Iraq and Afghanistan and then with al Qaeda in Libya. A year ago, our hawks wanted to take out Assad in Syria. Now, we want to have him with us against ISIS.

I agree with what Judge Andrew Napolitano wrote a few days ago:

What should Congress do? It should declare once and for all that we will stay out of this ancient Muslim civil war of Shia versus Sunni. We have been on both sides of it. Each side is barbarous. In the 1980s, we helped the Sunnis. Now, we are helping the Shias.

Last year, Mr. Obama offered to help the Islamic state by degrading its adversaries; now, he wants to degrade the Islamic state. We have slaughtered innocents and squandered fortunes in an effort to achieve temporary military victories that neither enhance our freedom nor fortify our safety.

We will only have peace when we come home, when we cease military intervention in an area of the world not suited for democracy and in which we are essentially despised.

I agree with Judge Napolitano.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I say again that we cannot take care of our own people and our country if we are permanently at war in the Middle East.

WILDFIRE SEASON IN THE WEST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from

California (Mr. LAMALFA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Madam Speaker, last night, in the town of Weed, California, which is in my own First Congressional District, over 100 of my constituents' homes were destroyed or damaged by fire, along with an elementary school and a timber mill, one of the area's largest employers. Thousands of my constituents are under evacuation orders, and the fire is not yet contained.

Aside from this tragedy, hundreds of thousands of acres of northern California forests have burned so far this year. In fact, the combined impact of the fires is already larger than last year's Rim Fire near Yosemite.

Unfortunately, while the Rim Fire received nonstop coverage, most of America is probably unaware of this year's calamities. The unfortunate truth is that rural California and much of the West experience massive wildfires like these every year. Over the past decade, wildfires have only grown in size and severity.

Madam Speaker, it doesn't have to be this way. We know why our forests are burning. It is because of decades of mismanagement caused by Federal bureaucracies and excessive regulations and red tape. They have an attitude at the Forest Service in many cases of just let it burn.

We suffer from road closures, inaccessibility to our forests, poor management, and, certainly, the ability to stop fires once they are started because of these policies.

The simple fact is our forests are not just mismanaged or even poorly managed. They are entirely unmanaged. As a result, they are overgrown, unhealthy, and ready to burst into flames at any time. I am supporting several measures to address the crisis in our forests, and last night's events create even more urgency for Congress and this administration to act.

Chairman HASTINGS' bill, H.R. 1526, which was passed in this House and I am a cosponsor of, would restore common sense to forest management, requiring the Forest Service to actively manage public forests to reduce fuel loads and improve forest health.

It is high time that the Senate act on this measure or, at the very least, produce its own forestry measure in the Senate so we can negotiate a final product. This would be part of the now 384 House bills that are languishing over in the Senate that need action.

Chairman SIMPSON's bill, H.R. 3992, another measure I am supporting and cosponsoring, will end the diversion of forest management funding to firefighting by treating fires like other disasters, allowing flexible wildfire disaster funding.

The Forest Service's increasing use of forest management funds for wildfire suppression means that we are no longer in the business of managing forests and, instead, just putting them out—or trying to—when they burn. This measure deserves a hearing in